



# EMPOWERMENT REPORT

(The Newsletter of the Empowerment Council)

## New EC Staff Explores Women's Experience of the Ontario Review Board (ORB) and Criminal Justice System

By Jessica Evans

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As a new face in the Empowerment Council Queen Street Office, I would like to take a quick moment to introduce myself and the work I'll be doing. My name is **Jessica Evans**. Since the beginning of August (and for the next year), I will be working as a part-time researcher with The Empowerment Council and am hoping to make connections with some of you, both inside and outside the Empowerment Council community. As part of my role here, I am working on finding out what challenges women (women as used in this article includes trans, cis-gendered and two spirit identified) under the Ontario Review Board system experience when they are trying to find housing (once they are given conditional or absolute discharge).

I am interested in finding out where women find housing, what the major problems with housing are, and how women deal with these challenges. The experiences of women who have been through the ORB system have not been looked at enough. There is also discrimination within our community towards people who have been found Not Criminally Responsible (NCR). But women in the system have unique needs and face problems that men do not. Issues of safety and access to children



are some of the ways that women will have different needs when looking for housing. For the Empowerment Council to effectively advocate for women in these positions, we need to know more about the experiences and problems that exist.

In addition to this research, I will also be conducting a **six-week workshop** for women-identified clients (primarily within CAMH). This workshop will take place in November, and consist of six two-hour sessions. We will explore tenant rights, the types of housing and supports that exist, the community resources that are available if you need to ensure your rights are respected, subsidy and income supports, working with child services, and dealing with violence in housing situations. Space is limited to 12 participants, and registration information will be sent out in the coming weeks for current or former clients who are interested. I would love to hear from you if you have any information or stories you would like to share.

Please contact me at:

[Jessica.Evans@camh.ca](mailto:Jessica.Evans@camh.ca)

I am also in the Queen Street EC offices, Room 160) Tuesdays and Wednesdays if you would like to stop by and chat.

## Where is the Client Voice at CAMH in the Future of Mental Health?

By Stef Mendolia

“Welcome to the Future of Mental Health” reads the Purple Doorway on the vacant field at the southeast corner of Queen Street West & Ossington Ave. It’s there because construction on the field will begin in October 2017 as part of CAMH’s ongoing redevelopment. Doors symbolize passageways from one place to another – opening and closing bringing transformation and change. Keys can symbolize power to create change and unlock hidden truths.

CAMH, along with eight other Law & Mental Health programs across Ontario, is piloting ‘Safewards’. Psychiatric Nurse Len Bowers and his research team crafted the original open-sourced, evidence-based model. It focuses on building a more peaceful unit atmosphere by educating staff on how to create a proactive culture of safety. The pilot started in July 2016, on units 3-1, 3-3, and 3-5.

The hope is for the Safewards pilot to be extended and/or implemented CAMH-wide. In January 2017, The Safewards pilot hired a “Peer Researcher” with The Empowerment Council (EC), Stef Mendolia. Their work involved advocating for the inclusion of the client experience in the implementation of “Safewards at CAMH”. The pilot offered a significant moment in mental health systems-level change history to include a consumer/survivor analysis in a much-needed dialogue on the topic of safety and violence.

We found that as comprehensive as the model is in offering strategies to increase safety on an inpatient unit, it leaves out some essential components: *Service-User Involvement* and *Human Rights-Based Advocacy for Mental Health & Addiction Clients in Psychiatric Facilities*.

The EC’s involvement shifted some of the focus back on the *CAMH Bill of Client Rights*. Our initiative “**Safewards Supporting the CAMH Bill of Client Rights**” included 1) Discussions about the Bill in meetings for Staff & Clients (separately) and 2) A Pizza Lunch focus group discussion for clients to give feedback on creating a safe environment at CAMH.

The ‘*client only*’ focused group discussion was called, “**Right #4: Freedom from Harm at CAMH**” – a combination of Right #4: Right to Quality Services that Comply with Standards, and Right #2: Right to Freedom from Harm. These are two areas of the Bill that we felt the Safewards pilot zoomed in on. We asked clients what makes them feel they are in a safe environment at CAMH and what needs to change. Feedback from the focus group discussion will be included in a final report, due later this fall, and will inform the work of The Empowerment Council moving forward.



### **Clients/Consumers & Survivors:**

~ Who holds the key to the future of mental health?

~ What is being prioritized in transforming the field?

~ If you had the key to the future of mental health, what would you do with it?

Let The Empowerment Council know. Email: [Stefania.Mendolia@camh.ca](mailto:Stefania.Mendolia@camh.ca)

## Reflections on a Student Placement at the Empowerment Council

By Chris Spencer

Going into the Social Service Worker program at George Brown College, I already had a passion for social justice work, especially in regards to mental health, psychiatry, LGBTQ+ issues, and white privilege. While looking for a placement, I perused through some frontline work that I could get into; working at a nursing home, youth shelter, LGBTQ+ groups, or end of life care. I never thought I would be able to apply my drive for social justice towards anything other than one-on-one client advocacy. The Empowerment Council (EC) gave me the opportunity to experience institutional and systemic advocacy from within the system. I couldn't believe that I would be situated at the heart of mental health work (CAMH) doing advocacy work that could potentially echo throughout Canada! Not only did I grow through doing social justice-oriented work, but I came to take pride in my Mad identity.

To be inclusive, to be client-centered, institutions like CAMH *must* provide space for the client voice, and we at the Empowerment Council take that role very seriously. One of the first projects I started to work on was organizing our collaborative event with CAMH, *Medical Assistance in Dying – Where is the Client Voice? Viewpoints and Considerations*. What an incredible opportunity to help bring together mental health service users and professionals for the first time to discuss medical assistance in dying (MAiD). It had been a year since MAiD became legal and service users hadn't had the opportunity to speak out about the complexity of requesting death when the main underlying condition is mental illness. It appalled me that professionals hadn't thought to ask for the opinions of the people they serve. It's ironic that the feedback from the discussion that came up most often was that there should be more room for the client voice to be heard.

Having studied critical psychology and social service work, I came into the EC with a good

understanding of the power of the psychiatric system and the marginalization

of crazy people. However, I was under the impression that these systems were changing – client-centered practice had become a trend that everyone must follow – but where was the client voice? How would the system change to suit the needs of clients if client feedback isn't sought out and used effectively? I wonder how many institutional and systemic barriers the EC has had to leap over to create strides in the direction of progress. With every focus group we facilitate, does client feedback make a difference? Is the system even listening? Is CAMH? Why is the EC made up of so few staff if CAMH is funding it to provide a megaphone for the client voice? How are we supposed to create any improvements if we aren't valued for what we are – experts from lived experience? Where is the client-centeredness? From where I stand, there's more talk than action.

I took the liberty of making a website for mental health service users on MAiD<sup>1</sup>. This was one way I created space for the voices of those identified as Consumer Survivor/Psychiatric Survivor/Crazy/Mentally Ill/Mad/Disabled. All articles and videos posted about MAiD, whether for, against, or in contention, were written by mental health service users. The intent was to provide space for service users to discuss MAiD's complex legislation, and I hope that this will come to fruition after our second MAiD event which will be exclusively for service users.

I intend on staying at the Empowerment Council as a volunteer, because I feel the weight of how much work there is to be done here, and how much I still have to learn about working with the system to create change. What I do know is that the more client voices are valued by professionals as experts of their own madness and the experience of the mental health system, the more progress will be made in better serving the community.

<sup>1</sup> <https://mentalhealthandassisteddeath.wordpress.com/>

**EC Receives Advocacy Award**



*Pictured accepting their awards for Advocacy in Mental Health at the Mental Health Legal Committee's 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebration are (from left) Jennifer Chambers, Executive Director, Lucy Costa, Deputy Executive Director, and 2016-2017 Empowerment Council Board Co-Chairs Kelly Lawless and Sheldon LaPorte.*



**THE EMPOWERMENT COUNCIL PRESENTS**  
**HOUSING IS A RIGHT:**  
**SIX WEEK WORKSHOP FOR**  
**WOMEN**

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Are you a woman (trans, cis-gendered, two spirit identified) who has at some point been found unfit to stand trial, or not criminally responsible on account of a mental health issue? Have you had a hard time finding housing? Do you know what landlords can and can't use to deny you from housing, or evict you?

The Empowerment Council is looking for 10- 12 women who have been involved with the mental health forensic system or the criminal justice system to participate in a Free six-week education and advocacy workshop. Together we will share info about our experiences, learn more about our housing rights, child services, and income supports.

November 13,14,20,21,27,28  
 1:00-3:00 PM

Participants are required to attend all classes, and there will be small homework assignments.

To apply please email [jessica.evans@camh.ca](mailto:jessica.evans@camh.ca)  
 Or call us 416 535-8501 Ext. 33013  
 Refreshments will be provided

**EMPOWERMENT COUNCIL GENERAL MEMBERSHIP FORM**

**EC Statement of Purpose:** *To conduct system wide advocacy on behalf of clients.*

**Contact Information:** *(Please Print Clearly)*

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Address \_\_\_\_\_  
 City \_\_\_\_\_ Postal code \_\_\_\_\_  
 Telephone \_\_\_\_\_ Email address \_\_\_\_\_

I have used mental health and/or addiction services (*check those that apply*):

*College Street site* \_\_\_\_\_ *Queen Street* \_\_\_\_\_ *Other: Mental Health* \_\_\_\_\_  
*Russell Street site* \_\_\_\_\_ *White Squirrel Way* \_\_\_\_\_ *Other Addiction* \_\_\_\_\_

**I support the purpose of the Empowerment Council:**

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Send to: **Empowerment Council, 33 Russell Street, Room 2008, Toronto, ON M5S 2S1**